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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 329TH
INFANTRY (83D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK
ALONG THE ROAD TO PERIERS, 4 JULY 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION
ATTACKING AN "ISLAND" OVER SWAMPY TERRAIN

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2d Battalion, 329th Infantry, 83d US Division, in the attack along the road to PERIERS, France, 4 July 1944, during the Normandy Campaign.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events which led up to this action.

On 6 June 1944 the First US Army and British Second Army successfully invaded France under operation plan OVERLORD. The main objectives were, first to establish a beachhead and, secondly, to destroy the German forces in Western France. The mission of the British Second Army was to protect the left flank of the US First Army against the expected counter-attacks. The US VII Corps of First Army to cut the COTENTIN peninsula and seize the port of CHERBOURG. The V Corps was to drive toward ST. LO. A-7, p. 88. (See Map A)

On D-Day the 83d Infantry Division was part of the US Third Army stationed in England. On 19 June 1944 the 83d Infantry Division sailed from PLYMOUTH and FALMOUTH for the coast of France. Because of bad storms in the English Channel the 83d Infantry Division was delayed in debarking. On 23 June 1944 the division debarked on Omaha Beach and closed in an assembly area near BRICQUEVILLE, France. A-2, page 22.

- (1) A-8, p. 88
- (2) A-2, p. 22

The port of CHERBOURG fell to the VII Corps on 27 June 1944. The First Army's plan then was to continue the drive to the south.

On 27 June 1944 the 83d Infantry Division left the assembly area at BRICQUEVILLE and moved by motor and foot through the recently captured town of CARENTAN on its way to relieve the 101st Airborne Division which was holding the line south and west of CARENTAN. (3) (See Map A)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The First Army's plan was to initiate an attack by its VIII Corps. The other corps would attack on order from First Army. This plan was put into effect by a field order issued 1 July 1944 by First Army. Before this attack could be launched there would have to be considerable regrouping of forces. On the left, V Corps would retain the 1st and 2d US Infantry Divisions and the 2d Armored Division. XIX Corps retained the 30th US Infantry Divisions. The VII Corps was moved to a position between VIII and XIX Corps and brought with it from CHERBOURG the 4th and 9th US Infantry Divisions and was to take over the 83d Infantry Division in its new location. (5) VIII Corps, located in the extreme right of the First Army zone, consisted of the 79th, 82d Airborne, 90th and 83d Infantry Divisions. On 2 July 1944 the 83d Infantry Division reverted from VIII to VII Corps in its present location.

The VIII Corps was to attack on 3 July 1944 with the 90th Infantry Division making the main effort. (6)

- (3) A-1, p. 28
- (4) A-7, p. 82
- (5) A-7, p. 82
- (6) A-7, p. 82

The terrain in the zone of the 90th Infantry Division presented a serious obstacle. The keypoint was HILL 122, which afforded the Germans observation over the entire division sector and extensively east into the VII Corps zone. (7)

The large swampy area, PRAIRIE MARECAGUSES de Gorges, ran across the sector of the 90th Infantry Division and east well into the sector of VII Corps - particularly in the zone of the 83d Infantry Division. Other than the two features mentioned, the terrain was not over one hundred meters high and well netted with unimproved roads and trails. The fields were well enclosed with the now famous hedgerows. (8)

The entire First Army was disposed on a thirty-five mile front of this. The 83d Infantry Division had about three miles. (9)

The 83d Infantry Division had the 331st Infantry Regiment on the right and the 330th Infantry Regiment on the left. The 1st Battalion of the 329th was in position protecting CARENTAN. The remainder of the regiment was in division reserve. (10)

The 83d Infantry Division had not yet had any combat time and the proper technique of fighting in hedgerows had not been tried by this division. Infantry-tank team was a phrase unheard of until a few days before relieving 101st Airborne Division, when the platoons were given three hours

- (7) A-18, p. 11
- (8) A-18, p. 11
- (9) A-7, p. 82
- (10) A-1, p. 26

of infantry-tank team training. The division was quite up to strength although a few casualties were suffered while in the front line defensive position. Morale was high. The division was well trained, except for deficiencies noted, and well supplied with ammunition and equipment. Only the 331st and 330th Regiments had gotten any patrol experience while the division was on line. (11)

According to G-2 reports and information received from the relieved 101st Airborne Division, the 83d Infantry Division would be opposed by the 17SS Panzer Grenadier Division and elements of the 6th Parachute Regiment of the 2d Parachute Division. The fighting spirit of these troops was excellent. (12)

VII Corps Field Order No. 4, 3 July 44, directed the VII Corps next operation would open 4 July 44. The 83d Infantry Division was to inaugurate the attack by jumping off 0445, pushing its attack along the line SAINTENY - le Rust and eliminate the enemy in the area of les Balerie - le Mesvil - le Bue in order to provide room for subsequent operations. If light opposition was encountered the drive was to continue to the TAUTE RIVER. (13)

The corps objective was the ridge line just north of SOULE RIVER. (14)

The 83d Infantry Division ordered the 331st and the 330th Infantry Regiments, with the 331st on the right, to attack generally south and cut the CARENTAN-PERIERS road.

- (11) Personal knowledge
- (12) Personal knowledge
- (13) A-5
- (14) A-3

2d Battalion, 329th Infantry, under division control, was to attack west, then south and seize the ground in vicinity of RAFFOVILLE and be prepared to continue the attack to PERIERS.

The remainder of the 329th, less Cannon Company, was to be in division reserve. (15)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 329TH INFANTRY

On 3 July the 329th Infantry was disposed with the 1st Battalion in defensive position with the mission of protecting CARENTAN. The 2d and 3d Battalions were in division reserve. For the attack on 4 July the 1st Battalion was to move from CARENTAN to become regimental reserve with the 3d Battalion, and only the 2d Battalion was to initiate the attack. The 2d Battalion was taken from regimental control and put under division control for the operation. No provisions were made for protection of the right flank of the 2d Battalion - the 2d Battalion was to use its reserve company for left flank protection and maintain contact with the 331st Infantry. (16)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

When the 2d Battalion, 329th Infantry moved from BRICQUEVILLE to LA GRANVALLERIE to become division reserve, it was not known to the battalion where and when it would see its first action. The morale of the battalion was high as they got paid on 30 June in their bivouac area and were provided with money order privileges. The strength of the battalion was one hundred percent. There was no supply

(15) A-1

(16) Personal knowledge: statement of Col E. B. Crabill,
29 Dec 1949

problem as far as the unit was concerned; however, in talking with the relieved 101st Airborne Division personnel, it was learned by the men and officers of the 2d Battalion that the Germans feared and had great respect for the US Browning Automatic Rifle. Efforts were made to secure more BARS through the Battalion S-4. He obtained three for each rifle company. (17)

Upon receiving their first attack order on 2 July 1944, the 2d Battalion made additional efforts to secure ammunition above the unit of fire. Additional light machine guns were also obtained. Because of their knowledge of the swampy terrain in the area, there was great concern in the minds of the battalion personnel whether an antitank rifle grenade would detonate on contact with the ground. This was soon tried, and proved possible; a sigh of relief could be seen on all faces. (18)

The terrain in the zone of the 2d Battalion also presented other obstacles. Because of the swampy area lying between the proposed line of departure and the enemy held ground, it seemed that it would not be possible to use infantry-tank teams, or even be able to pull the towed 57-mm antitank guns to the objective area. Emphasis was then placed on antitank rifle grenades and rocket launchers.

No patrols had been sent out from the battalion to actually determine how swampy the ground was, but from all reports received it seemed it would present a problem of getting antitank protection on the objective area. From a

(17) Personal knowledge : statement of Lt Arthur J. Wagner

(18) Personal knowledge

map study of the terrain the battalion commander could tell that the ground in the objective area should be of firm standing. There were no roads or bridges crossing the swamp.

The so-called "island" that comprised part of the objective area was about 900 yards long and about 500 yards wide - with the forward tip only about 200 yards wide. (See Map B) It was covered completely by small fields well enclosed by hedgerows. The island was cut lengthwise by dirt roads which ran from the swamp to the rear - generally down the center of the island. All around the island there was a ditch two feet deep and about 12 feet wide - well filled with water. There were three buildings about one hundred yards from the edge of the swamp.

The main enemy forces in this area were elements of 17SS Panzer Grenadier Division and of the 6th Parachute Regiment. G-2 reports stated the island was held by "remnants of a company," mostly Russian volunteers and conscripted laborers. The "remnants" had no desire to fight and wished to surrender. However the 17SS Panzer Grenadiers were known to be tenacious fighters. (19)

The weather was warm and sunny with very few local showers. This would not present a problem to the battalion or should it affect its operation.

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The line of departure would be the east side of the swamp; H-Hour, 0445 3 July 1944.

The 2d Battalion's plan was to attack in a column of companies. F Company would lead off with two platoons

(19) Personal knowledge and statement of Lt Col C. L. Bowen, Jr

abreast and upon reaching the first phase line the battalion commander would be notified and E Company would cross the LofD and move to the left of F Company with the road as a boundary between the two companies. (See Map C) F Company would reorganize on the right of the road and be prepared to push on as soon as E Company came abreast. G Company was to be the battalion reserve and would cross the swamp on order from the battalion commander and move on the left flank of the two lead companies with the mission of protecting the left flank and maintaining contact with the 331st Infantry Regiment. Upon reaching the objective the battalion would reorganize and be prepared to continue the attack on order.

Accompanying F Company would be one artillery forward observer and an engineer officer who was to determine the trafficability of the swamp. The battalion 57-mm antitank platoon was to follow E Company and upon reaching the first phase line be under battalion control. Attached to F Company would be one platoon of heavy machine guns from H Company. The command group of F Company was to be followed by F Company's support platoon. Cannon Company, 329th Infantry was to fire on the enemy position from H-15 to H-hour. The battalion would also be supported by the 322d Field Artillery Battalion and the 324th Field Artillery Medium Battalion, who would fire from H-20 to H-Hour along with all corps and army battalions that could reach the objective area. The 81-mm Mortar Platoon, H Company was to support from rear of LofD.

Also attached to the battalion, and to be committed as soon as possible was a platoon of tanks from the 746th Tank

Battalion and a platoon of tank destroyers from the 802d TD Battalion. On call the battalion could obtain support from the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, 2d Armored Division.

The battalion OP would be on the LofD; battalion CP and aid station near buildings as shown on Map C. The 2d Heavy Machine Gun Platoon, H Company support by fire as soon as possible from LofD.

The battalion commander took his company commanders on reconnaissance to the LofD and along the route to the forward assembly area. In turn, the company commanders took their platoon leaders on the same reconnaissance. Upon returning to the bivouac area the platoon leaders thoroughly briefed their platoons.

At about 1700, 2 July 1944 the battalion was informed it would not attack on 3 July but on 4 July, same time and formation. This gave the battalion another 24 hours to iron out any wrinkles in their plan. (20)

MOVEMENT TO THE LOFD AND FINAL PREPARATION FOR THE ATTACK

During the afternoon of 3 July 1944 ammunition was distributed and combat packs were stripped to the very bare essentials. Duffle bags were packed and turned over to the regimental S-4 for storage. Gas masks were piled in the bivouac area, to be removed later by regiment. One C-ration was issued per individual - not to be consumed until breakfast 4 July. A hot supper was served on the evening of 3 July after which kitchens reverted to regimental control. (21)

(20) Personal knowledge and statement of Lt Col C. L. Bowen, Jr.

(21) Personal knowledge

At 0300, 4 July the battalion was alerted for movement to the forward assembly area. It moved out from its bivouac area at LA GRANVALLERIE in the order of F Company, E Company, H Company, Headquarters and G Company. Upon reaching its forward assembly area it halted and consumed its breakfast ration. (See Map B) As soon as the supporting artillery concentrations started falling the battalion moved to the line of departure, with F Company going to the line of departure, and E Company just to the east. While F Company was waiting for H-Hour, Lt Smith, the battalion S-2, came to the battalion commander with a new aerial photo of the objective, indicating that much new digging had taken place by the Germans. Hurriedly it was passed to the officers of F Company who took a look at it and became bewildered. It was too late to change the plan of attack as H-Hour was here. (22)

NARRATION

THE ATTACK OF THE "ISLAND"

Company F, led by Capt Richard E. Randall, crossed the line of departure with the 1st Platoon, led by Lt George W. Stahley on the left and the 2d Platoon, led by Lt Donald L. Richardson on the right. (See Map C) They had a perfect formation and looked like they were on a blank fire problem. But something happened immediately that F Company hadn't planned on; there was already slight fog in the area, daylight hadn't arrived as yet and the smoke from the artillery concentrations settled between the LofD and the objective. It was impossible to see anything. The two assault platoons

(22) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

disappeared in the fog and smoke, so F Company commander decided to also move out. With him went the artillery forward observer, the engineer officer and his party, Lt George P. Hopley with F Company's light machine gun section, Lt Frank R. Yukl, platoon leader of 3d Platoon and two F Company runners. The command group was halfway across the swamp when the enemy started opening fire with machine guns, mortars and artillery. One platoon of H Company's heavy machine guns set up on a LofD were unable to fire a shot in support of F Company as visibility was nil. The enemy machine gun fire was mostly in the 2d Platoon's zone. (23)

The command party started to receive casualties. The engineer officer was severely wounded - one runner was wounded, Lt Yukl and Capt Randall were both slightly wounded but stayed on.

Upon reaching the island F Company commander found that 2d Platoon had veered to the right. The 1st Platoon was dead on for directions. The support squad of the 1st Platoon was immediately committed to fill in the gap between the two platoons. After a brisk fight the first hedgerow was taken. F Company commander, in this action, was wounded about the face and left arm by a potato masher grenade. Members of his company insisted he go back to the aid station - he refused, and accepted first aid treatment from a company aid man. (24)

After receiving first aid the company commander was approached by a runner from the 1st Platoon, telling him that Lt George W. Stahley had been killed. The runner was

(23) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

(24) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

quite hysterical and the company commander could not find out from him as to the exact status of the 1st Platoon. So he immediately sent Lt Yukl over to the 1st Platoon to find what the situation was. (25)

By this time the smoke had lifted, and Capt Randall started to the right where the 2d Platoon should be. The first man he met was Lt Richardson - dead; ^{he} had taken a burst of machine gun fire through the middle. Capt Randall couldn't find the platoon sergeant so he took over momentarily himself. (26)

After briefly questioning members of the 2d Platoon, Capt Randall found out what the 2d Platoon had encountered. As soon as the artillery fire was lifted, 2d Platoon left the line of departure and immediately came under enemy machine gun fire and had its two lead squads pinned down in the swamp. Lt Richardson sent Staff Sergeant Gentile with his support squad around the right to knock out the guns that had been holding up the advance of the 2d Platoon.

(See Map C) The squad was successful and enabled the rest of the 2d Platoon to get up and move to the first hedgerow. While leading the platoon forward to the "island," Lt Richardson was killed by machine gun fire.

Things were fairly quiet now except for friendly artillery concentrations which were falling too far forward of the friendly troops. The artillery forward observer had been severely wounded and now artillery fire was being observed by the artillery liaison officer from the battalion

- (25) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950
(26) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

OP. It was very difficult to observe fire from the OP as it was not known at the OP just exactly where F Company was located. The liaison officer had very little information of the action as little information had been given to the battalion commander. And when the artillery liaison officer became a casualty he was replaced by one who knew absolutely nothing of the situation. (27)

At 0700 Capt Randall called the battalion commander, Lt Col Claude L. Bowen, Jr., and gave him the location of F Company, the names of key leaders that were casualties and an estimate of the fighting strength of the two platoons on position.

The 2d Platoon was about half strength and the morale was broken - the 1st Platoon had about 25 men left. The company commander took the support squad of the 1st Platoon and spread it out thinly along the line, filled in gaps, and then notified Lt Yukl, who was now in command of the platoon, of what he had done. (28)

After spreading troops thinly along the line, Capt Randall called Lt Hansel, Executive Officer of F Company, and told him of the situation and to take command of the support platoon and wait for orders to cross the swamp. During this conversation the Weapons Platoon of F Company came over. Why? Nobody knew, unless the platoon sergeant thought they were needed. Capt Randall held them at the first hedgerow until he could determine where they could best be used. (29)

(27) Personal knowledge

(28) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

(29) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

Soon Lt Hansel came over with the support platoon. He said word was received at the battalion OP that the company commander had been knocked out and that the support platoon was needed. (30)

The company commander felt that he must bolster the 2d Platoon as they were in tough shape; so he took one squad of the 3d Platoon and added it to the thinly held interval and shifted the rest of the 2d Platoon a little to the right. He didn't want to commit the whole support platoon so only used the one squad and left the rest as a possible maneuvering force to the right as there were no friendly troops in that area. The 90th Division had not advanced far enough to make contact possible with the 2d Battalion. (31)

Capt Randall was preparing for a counterattack that was sure to come at any time. He sent Lt Hopley with the light machine gun section to the left to join the 1st Platoon and had the platoon sergeant take the 60-mm Mortar Section and placed them in action behind the 2d Platoon.

F Company had not been getting any motor support up to this time. The platoon leader of the 81-mm Mortar Platoon could not ascertain the exact location of F Company's front lines. Soon after F Company had its crew-served weapons in place mortar fire began falling on the hedgerows they were holding. They didn't know if it was enemy or friendly mortar fire but it did cause some more casualties. Lt George P. Hopley, Weapons Platoon Leader of F Company, was killed by this fire. Lt Yukl suffered severe concussion and Capt

(30) Statement of Lt Jack Hansel, 20 Dec 1949

(31) Statement of Lt Jack Hansel, 20 Dec 1949

Randall was wounded again. Soon both recovered enough to go on. (32)

At about 0800 when Capt Randall went to see Lt Hansel, who was now in command of the 2d Platoon, and 1st Sgt Fowler who was in command of the remainder of the 3d Platoon at the edge of the swamp, he saw E Company all mixed up with F Company. E Company was not to cross the swamp until F Company had reached the first phase line, but because of F Company's precarious position the battalion commander decided to send E Company over to drive the enemy back. E Company commander, Capt Raymond E. Poore, didn't know the exact location of F Company but veered to the right to make sure they would effect contact. (33)

E Company suffered terrific casualties in crossing the swamp. They were disposed with two platoons abreast followed by the Weapons Platoon and the support platoon. Lt. Robert G. Jacobson had been killed. Lt John A. Allen was severely wounded in the center of the swamp. Capt Poore suffered severe concussion upon reaching his forward platoons.

With the assistance of Lt Bialek and Lt Zender of E Company, Capt Randall spent some time getting the two companies separated. They finally found about 75 E Company men and called it Company E. There were still some ITS men in F Company that were found later; the rest had been casualties in crossing the swamp. The E Company men in F Company's 2d Platoon bolstered the strength of the 2d Platoon so were allowed to remain there. Capt Randall then pulled out the

- (32) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950
(33) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

one squad of the 3d Platoon and had it revert back to the 3d Platoon. This gave F Company a support platoon of about 35 men. (34) (See Map D)

While E and F Companies were reorganizing G Company moved to the LofD. In moving up they started to receive 88-mm fire. The platoon leader of the 3d Platoon, Lt Virgil M. McClintic, was wounded. One company aid man was wounded by a sniper. G Company was prepared to cross the swamp and move on the left of E Company on order. It would move in a column of platoons, 1st, 2d, Weapons and 3d. Shortly after it reached the LofD it received more 88-mm fire coming from the zone of the 331st Infantry Regiment. Several men had been killed and wounded, so the battalion commander ordered Capt Granville A. Sharpe, G Company commander, to have his company dig in on the LofD as they probably wouldn't be sent over for some time. The men dug in. (35)

H Company's 2d Machine Gun Platoon was ordered into position on the first hedgerow on edge of the swamp and be prepared to render fire support to E and F Companies. They were hardly in position when a direct hit from an 88-mm hit one of their machine guns, killing the platoon sergeant, Frank T. Clemens, and the entire gun crew. The battalion commander and G Company commander were also wounded but not evacuated. (36)

Cannon Company and supporting artillery battalion kept firing on the objective. These fires were not observed too well as there was no forward observer with E and F Companies.

- (34) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950
- (35) Personal knowledge
- (36) Personal knowledge

During the reorganization of E and F Companies, Lt Bialek, Executive Officer of E Company, suggested that all officers take orders from Capt Randall, as he was quite familiar with the situation, and to group the remaining men of E Company less the Weapons Platoon, and call it a platoon of F Company. Lt Zender of E Company would take command of the Weapons Platoons of both companies. This was finally agreed upon by the officers and they were ready to move again.

Capt Randall's plan then was to split the riflemen of E Company under Lt Bialek, and straighten out the line on the left with one group to attempt to reduce the enemy in the left sector of the battalion. Capt Randall was to take the 3d Platoon of F Company and straighten out the right side of the line and move up on the right of the "island." Both units pushed simultaneously with 60-mm mortar support. Lt Bialek was successful in straightening the line. Capt Randall was unsuccessful as the enemy machine guns opened up in the 90th Division zone. His group suffered a few casualties. Then with more mortar fire he tried it again - without success. Then Lt Zender tried it with mortar crews as riflemen but also had no success. Light machine guns were used as much as possible each time. The platoon of heavy machine guns in the center also gave limited fire support because of the hedgerows. (See Map D)

At about 1200 Lt Yukl and Lt Hansel tried another frontal attack in conjunction with two flanking attempts, supported by machine guns and 60-mm mortars but met with no success. (37)

(37) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

Capt Randall called the battalion commander on the only SCR-300 they had on the position to request lots of mortar and artillery fire to keep the Germans from forming for counterattacks. The request was granted - along with white phosphorus from the Cannon Company. E and F Companies were receiving heavy mortar fire and were expecting a counter-attack any minute. Lt Yukl reported hearing enemy tanks to the front. The men were dug in, either in new holes or holes left by the Germans. About every fourth man was designated as a look-out man for counterattacks. E and F Companies were receiving very little small arms fire at this time. (38)

Again Capt Randall called the battalion commander and told him he was stuck but would try it again. The battalion commander said, "No, hold up where you are and reorganize the best you can and dig in." The battalion commander stated he would send G Company over after dark to render assistance. He had planned to send G Company over sooner but because of the enemy fire on the line of departure and in the swamp there would be too many casualties. (39)

When Lt Col Bowen informed Division of the situation and his plan he was told to send out G Company at 1500 regardless.

Upon effecting reorganization on his position Capt Randall had a nose count taken and found there were only about 100 effective fighters on the position.

At about 1330 the first enemy counterattack came. They hit on the right flank; infantry supported by self-propelled

(38) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

(39) Statement of Lt Col C. L. Bowen, Jr

88s. The 2d Platoon of F Company was forced to yield and drop back one hedgerow. (See Map E)

Both the company commander and the platoon leader tried to hold the men there but they withdrew to the next hedgerow in a daze.

At 1430 the second counterattack was launched by the Germans, this time on the left of the position. (See Map E) The enemy drove back Lt Bialek's flank and caused about 40 casualties - killed, wounded and missing. Lt Milton J. Bialek was killed and Lt Ernest L. MacMurphy, Jr., was severely wounded. Lt Costa reported to Capt Randall that the situation looked bad as far as machine gun support was concerned. His men were removing the bolts from their guns and withdrawing. The other officers begged to drop back one hedgerow to better positions with the few men that were still available. At this point it became evident that unless reinforcements were received, a withdrawal would be in order. (40)

Capt Randall immediately called the battalion commander and told him of the situation; that he needed reinforcements or would like to withdraw as he didn't have enough troops to hold the last hedgerow he was on. The battalion commander said to start a withdrawal. Capt Randall informed the battalion commander that he would like lots of smoke - especially on the left to obscure observation from the enemy machine guns that were firing into their backs from the 331st Infantry zone and also on the right in the 90th Division zone.

(40) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

The battalion commander notified Division of the situation and they okeyed the withdrawal. G Company was then notified it would not cross the swamp at 1500 but to stay in position and render fire support if necessary for the withdrawal of E and F Companies.

The plan of withdrawal was for Lt Zender and Capt Randall to stay with the 3d Platoon of F Company on the hedgerow on the edge of the "island." Lt Yukl and Lt Hansell would take what was left of E and F Companies and start back under cover of smoke and take up positions along the line of departure. As soon as smoke was heavy enough the withdrawal would start. (41)

At this time Company G, from its position, could see enemy troops to the left of the line held by E and F Companies. They appeared to be wanting to surrender. A platoon leader of G Company walked out into the swamp on the left of the line of departure and by waving and calling to them, got about 20 to start across the swamp to the LofD. The would-be prisoners hadn't gone very far when either their own machine guns from the 331st Infantry zone or the 2d Battalion's supporting artillery fired on them. They withdrew to their original position. The next time they came out there were about 50 but they quickly withdrew for the same reason. The platoon leader ran to the artillery liaison officer and requested that the fires either be stopped or shifted. The artillery observer informed the platoon leader that he could not stop the fires as they were being controlled by Division

(41) Statement of Capt Richard E. Randall, 28 Jan 1950

and that he had to fire them in order to allow E and F Companies to withdraw. The fires continued and no prisoners were taken. (42)

E and F Companies slowly started their withdrawal. Although the companies had taken a terrific beating on the "island" some men were very reluctant about withdrawing and elected to remain and infiltrate back during the night under cover of darkness.

Lt Yukl and Lt Hansel started their withdrawal with as many men as could be coaxed into withdrawing. Nearly everybody went back on their hands and knees - either singly or in groups of twos or threes. Lt Yukl was killed in the swamp in the withdrawal; however Lt Hansel made his way back, taking advantage of the small canal ditch and began placing the men in firing position on the right of the line of departure to cover the withdrawal of the 3d Platoon of F Company.

When Capt Randall thought this group was in position he started the withdrawal of the 3d Platoon. Both he and Lt Zender had a difficult job in persuading the 3d Platoon to keep dispersed and under cover of the smoke. Capt Randall was handicapped in his movements by carrying the 1st Sgt of E Company under one arm and an F Company man, who had been blinded by a mortar shell, under the other arm. Both officers were successful in getting the 3d Platoon back to the LofD even though they became separated several times.

(42) Personal knowledge

Upon reaching the line of departure area Capt Randall rounded up all the men of the two companies and led them to the battalion aid station. Those in need of first aid were treated immediately or evacuated. Capt Randall reported to the battalion commander. The battalion commander ordered Capt Richard Carr, battalion S-3, to take Capt Randall to regiment and give a report of the operations to Maj Holt, regimental S-3. Upon completion of the report Capt Randall was to be evacuated as a casualty; however he went back to his company to see his men. He was later found there by the battalion and regimental commanders and placed in an ambulance and evacuated. (43)

During the day the battalion surgeon, Capt John M. Bretz, refused to let any of his aid men go out into the swamp and evacuate the wounded. No doubt there was a considerable number of wounded in the swamp, judging by the few who had withdrawn.

At about 2200, one of the two G Company's German speaking lieutenants obtained the company commander's permission to alert the company in position and be prepared to assist him, by fire if necessary, in the evacuation of the wounded. He then walked out to the middle of the swamp to a man who was severely wounded. He also noticed several others lying around wounded or dead. He called to the Germans and asked for medical assistance and a truce, whereupon two German parachute medics appeared with a white undershirt on a stick. With the German medics assistance, leg and arm splints were

(43) Personal knowledge and statement of Lt Col C. L. Bowen, Jr

improvised and this one casualty was ready for evacuation. However, the German medics refused to assist in carrying the wounded soldier to the American side. The officer then called to the other German speaking lieutenant and asked him to bring a litter and a few men to help carry. While this was being acknowledged a truce was made to the effect that the 2d Battalion aid station personnel would be allowed to help evacuate the wounded from the swamp. The battalion surgeon was immediately notified and he came forward with the entire aid station personnel and the swamp was cleared of all the wounded. The German medics informed the battalion surgeon that all American casualties on the "island" had been treated and evacuated; the exact number was not revealed. Several of the casualties evacuated to the battalion aid station died during the night, as ambulances were forbidden to use the road because of light enemy interdiction fire. (44)

G Company took up a defensive position along the line of departure and stayed there the night of 4-5 July 1944. The night was uneventful except for a small enemy patrol that tried to infiltrate into the 2d Battalion lines. They were forced to retreat, yielding only one prisoner.

To sum up the results of the battle: The 2d Battalion, 329th Infantry, failed miserably in its attempt to gain any ground along the CARENTAN-PERIERS Road. However, it did take slight pressure off the 90th Division on the right and the 331st Infantry on the left, allowing both to make slight

(44) Personal knowledge

gains. As viewed from a division level, this attack did not help the operation of the division on that day or for several weeks to come. As for the future fighting capabilities of the 2d Battalion, 329th Infantry Regiment, one may quote Col Edwin B. Crabill, regimental commander, "They were of no future value in the Normandy Campaign and only began to be a fighting unit again in ST. MALO Campaign." (45)

As to the number of German casualties, not much could be said, as the 2d Battalion never got on the position far enough to get an estimate. However, the 2d Battalion took terrific casualties. This can be substantiated by an entry in the Unit Journal, 329th Infantry, as of 1100, 5 July 1944, "2d Battalion estimated the strength of F and E Companies at 70 each. G Company was minus 20. Battalion Headquarters Company minus 11, H Company, part of one platoon missing, in addition to other casualties. Stragglers were still coming in." (46)

Of the casualties reported, seven were officers killed in action, four officers wounded requiring evacuation, and two officers required evacuation for rest. In addition, two field artillery observers and an engineer officer were evacuated for wounds. E and F Companies lost nearly all of their key noncommissioned officers.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. PATROLLING

The fact that the 2d Battalion had not patrolled to and in the objective area seriously handicapped the battalion

(45) Statement of Col Edwin B. Crabill, 29 Dec 1949

(46) A-2, p. 32

because of lack of information of the enemy. The only information obtained of the "island" was secured by the 83d Reconnaissance Troop and this stated that the "island was held by remnants of a company," plus Russian volunteer and conscripted laborers, who had a desire to surrender. Had this been the case, more prisoners would have been taken by the 101st Airborne Division and also by the relieving 331st Infantry Regiment. The late arrival of an aerial photo of the "island" showed many additional positions that were not spotted in patrolling by any unit.

2. THE SWAMP

The swamp certainly hindered the operation of the battalion. In moving 300 yards over the open terrain the advancing platoons were under enemy observation and direct fire at all times. In places, it was difficult for a combat loaded soldier to walk because of the spongy ground. It slowed up his advance, making it difficult for the platoon leader to keep the proper formation. Had there been a thorough reconnaissance made of the swamp prior to the attack, it is certain that there were places where movement would have been easier. Also the available tanks could have been used by the battalion in crossing the swamp. Some men found the ground fairly firm and wondered why the tanks were not used. On evacuation, the engineer officer stated he believed that there were routes suitable for tank movement. Had he been able to get back himself or send the information back, the tanks could at least have been taken out as far as possible and rendered fire support from that position.

3. THE OBJECTIVE

It is my opinion that the objective assigned to the battalion was not too large but was one that could have more easily been by-passed. The "island" did not possess any altitude and therefore was worthless as a location for future OPs for future operations. It wasn't large enough to properly disperse a battalion on even if it had been taken unless the unit would be able to continue the advance immediately to the south. Because of its location it was very easy for the Germans to defend; it was easily visible from both flanks and its troops could easily be supported by fire from either flank.

4. SUPPORTING FIRES

Arrangements were made for ample supporting fires. However they were not observed as should be. The supporting fires fell continuously on the objective but never on the enemy strong points. When the forward observer became a casualty there was no one with the lead company who was capable of observing artillery fires. It then had to be accomplished from the battalion OP by the artillery liaison officer who could not see the exact positions of the Germans or our own front lines. During the operation he received insufficient information to properly adjust enemy strong points.

The battalion 81-mm Mortar Platoon was firing on areas believed to contain the enemy; however their fires were falling too far to the rear and certainly did not harass the front line defender.

Cannon Company, 329th Infantry, placed accurate fire whenever it received information from the front line troops. Their fires were mostly limited to smoke missions.

The smoke missions of all supporting arms were well executed. There was sufficient smoke placed on the objective and on both flanks to enable E and F Companies to effectively withdraw.

5. GREEN TROOPS

*Indefinite
Reconnaissance
Mission*

This certainly was an engagement that ably seasoned combat troops could be successful in. The entire battalion had not seen previous action; not even so much as patrolling. They were well trained, but it takes a little previous experience to accomplish such a task. Their morale was high; and when the information was given out that the position was being held by an enemy that "wanted to surrender," they felt this to be an easy task for their first combat.

6. THE PLAN OF ATTACK

We cannot say that the battalion commander's plan of attack was incorrect. However, it is felt that this being their first combat, it would have been better to attack with two companies abreast; thereby initially distributing the enemy's strength to more of our own forces. E Company would have been much more effective had they also crossed the LofD at H-Hour. By going over later they became mingled with F Company, as F Company had not proceeded to the first phase line as yet. Much valuable time was lost in trying to separate the two; this was never fully accomplished and some of E Company's men fought under the command of F Company's smaller units.

The Reserve Company, G Company, should not have been moved to the line of departure unless they were to be committed immediately. They were exposed to every observation and took twenty needless casualties, breaking the morale of the battalion reserve before ever being committed to action.

7. EVACUATION OF CASUALTIES

The battalion surgeon's refusal to let any aid men enter the swamp probably saved the lives of a few aid men, but certainly caused the death of many wounded men in the swamp. Even G Company casualties on the LofD had to be evacuated by G Company personnel. Had not a platoon leader of G Company made a truce with the Germans, many of the wounded in the swamp would have been left there to die.

Evacuation of wounded from the battalion aid station by ambulance can easily be accomplished during darkness. Light interdictory fire must not be allowed to interfere with evacuation of the wounded.

8. VISIBILITY

It is very important for combat troops to either be able to see where they are or where they are going. Because of the early hour of attack, visibility was nil. The lead platoon of F Company had to rely on a compass to guide them to the objective. It was so dark it was almost impossible to see the man next to you; consequently, the men had a tendency to group together, subjecting more men to a single enemy machine gun's fire. The fog hanging over the swamp, darkness, and artillery smoke, made it difficult to see for the first hour of the attack. Because of the lack of

visibility the 2d Platoon of F Company veered too far to the right, and created a serious gap between the two platoons, giving the defender an opportunity to effect flanking fire on both platoons. Lack of visibility made it impossible to adjust supporting fires.

LESSONS

1. Patrols must be sent out by the attacking unit, in the contemplated zone, to obtain all the information possible of the avenue of approach, the objective area, and the enemy position.

2. Objective assigned a unit must be one that the unit is capable of taking, and when taken be of some value for future operations.

3. Knowledge of the trafficability of the zone of advance is very important in developing a correct plan of maneuver.

4. Supporting fires must be observed at all times.

5. Troops should be given a mission commensurate with their combat experience.

6. A plan of attack should be planned to meet any eventuality.

7. The wounded must be evacuated as soon as possible.

8. Visibility is necessary, in that troops must know where they are, where they are going, and where they are when they get there.